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ABSTRACT

This paper presents and analyzes two examples of classroom discourse which belong to the genre of "talk about texts." Both are extracts from discussions between a small group of primary school students and their teacher (in England) on the topic of short texts of narrative fiction which they have just read together during the "Literacy Hour"; the discussions are therefore examples of a form of comprehension activity familiar in many classrooms. Drawing on concepts from the work of the Bakhtin Circle, the paper argues that one of the sequences exemplifies "pedagogical dialogue," in which someone who knows and possesses the truth instructs someone who is in error. It interprets the second sequence as an instance of "internally persuasive discourse," in which students are required to retell the story in their own words and voice their own evaluative orientations, rather than reciting it by heart. It concludes that, because talk about literary texts is a non-algorithmic form of knowledge, a dialogical pedagogy is better suited to inducting students into this form of literacy practice than are approaches which rely on scores in standardized tests. In the face of increasing state prescription of curriculum and pedagogy, the introduction of payment by results, and the dogmatic dismissal by the New Labor government of all of its policies as "elitism," it must be doubted whether a general shift from "pedagogical dialogue" to a dialogical pedagogy can be accomplished without collective action on the part of the teaching force aimed at regaining a measure of professional autonomy and securing greater control over the exercise of their own labor power. (Contains 29 references.) (RS)

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The Dialogue of Spoken Word and Written Word.

by David W. Skidmore

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The dialogue of spoken word and written word

David Skidmore

Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, University of Sussex at Brighton, September 2-5 1999

In this paper, I will analyse two examples of classroom discourse which belong to the genre of 'talk about texts'. Both are extracts from discussions between a small group of primary school students and their teacher on the topic of short texts of narrative fiction which they have just read together; the discussions are therefore examples of a form of comprehension activity familiar in many classrooms. On the basis of some observable contrasts between the two extracts, I will raise some theoretical questions about what forms of verbal interaction between students and teacher might best contribute to the development of the students' independent powers to engage in literacy practices. My concern is not with literacy conceived narrowly in terms of cognitive skills such as decoding or word recognition; nor with oracy *per se*, i.e. general competence in speaking and listening. It is rather with the role of spoken discourse in enhancing students' ability to produce meaning from their engagement with written text, in line with the broader understanding of literacy as a socio-cultural practice found in recent educational research in this field (Cairney, 1995). An increasing recognition of the close relationship between talk and literacy is found, for example, in the work of Olson, who has argued that the acquisition of literacy should be understood as the ability to participate in institutionalised literate activities (Olson & Torrance, 1991). This leads him to stress the importance for competence in literacy of acquiring an oral metalanguage which makes written text available as an object of reflection; he proposes the term 'orality' to distinguish this facility from the more general concept of oracy. There is an affinity between this term and the concept of 'literate thinking' proposed by Wells to refer to 'all those uses of language in which its symbolic potential is deliberately exploited as a tool for thinking'

(Wells, 1989: 253). Whilst for Wells, the written mode is not a necessary correlate of literate thinking in all circumstances, collaborative talk about texts is nevertheless an indispensable part of the child's induction into the literate behaviour of their culture (Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992).

In addition to the broad conception of literacy associated with the socio-cultural tradition of research, in my discussion of the transcripts I will also make use of theoretical concepts drawn from the work of the Bakhtin Circle, which I believe may help to illuminate certain qualities of classroom talk from a fresh angle. Dialogism, the umbrella term often used to describe Bakhtinian theory (Brandist, 1997; Holquist, 1990), departs in a number of crucial respects from the assumptions of the dominant approach to language in the West during the twentieth century, the discipline of structural linguistics established by the work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1974). De Saussure drew a dichotomy between *langue*, the unified, normative system of language, and *parole*, the chaotic diversity of speech events, and argued that linguistics should focus on the former. Against this, Bakhtin argued that the idea of language as a closed, self-consistent system is an ideological construct, something always posited, never given; the reality is that, at any historical moment, the totality which we call a language is made up of many different, mutually contradictory languages, refracting the different socio-ideological positions of various social groups (occupations, generations, classes etc.). Bakhtin introduced the term *heteroglossia* (and the associated adjective, heteroglot) to describe this condition of internal stratification and differentiation, which he sees as a fundamental, intrinsic property, part of the ontology of language (Bakhtin, 1981: 262-263). A related but contrasting term in Bakhtinian thought is *monologism*. Strictly speaking, true monologue is a non-possibility for Bakhtin, but he uses the concept of the monological utterance to identify the tendency in discourse to portray the speaker's position as the 'last word' to be said on the matter, the attempt in practice to effect a closure upon dialogue. Significantly for our present purpose, Bakhtin uses the example of teacher-pupil discourse to illustrate the concept, though I think we should take him to mean that teacher-student talk all too often assumes a monological form, rather than to suggest that it must be or ought to be so (Bakhtin, 1984: 81; emphasis added):

> In an environment of ... monologism the genuine interaction of consciousnesses is impossible, and thus a genuine dialogue is impossible as well. In essence idealism knows only a single mode of cognitive interaction among consciousnesses: *someone who knows and possesses the truth instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error*; that is, it is the interaction of a teacher and a pupil, which, it follows, can only be a pedagogical dialogue.

A further distinction which Bakhtin makes which is relevant to the present paper is that between *internally persuasive discourse* and *authoritative discourse* (Bakhtin, 1981: 342 ff.), which can be seen as the expression in actual language use of the pervasive forces of heteroglossia and monologism. Authoritative discourse refers to those forms of language use which present themselves as unchallengeable orthodoxy, formulating a position which is not open to debate (for example, religious dogma); it 'demands our unconditional allegiance' (Bakhtin, 1981: 343). The semantic structure of internally persuasive discourse, by contrast, is open; it acknowledges the primacy of dialogue, the impossibility of any word ever being final, and for this reason it is 'able to reveal ever newer *ways to mean*' (Bakhtin, 1981: 346; original emphasis).

Previous explorations of the significance of Bakhtinian ideas in the context of literacy education include the studies of Nystrand et al. (1997) and Lyle (1998). Interpreting the findings of a two-year study of patterns of classroom discourse in some 400 eighth and ninth grade English lessons in 25 US schools, Nystrand found that the prevalent discursive norm was monological, as indicated for example by: a high proportion of teacher-initiated test-like questions; minimal elaboration of students' responses by the teacher; and students' attempts to introduce new subtopics being discouraged or ignored by the teacher. By contrast, a different pattern of interaction, which Nystrand calls dialogically-organised instruction, was found in a small proportion of classrooms, characterised by the following features: the use of authentic questions, where the answer is not prespecified; uptake, the incorporation of previous answers into subsequent questions; and high-level evaluation, i.e. the extent to which the teacher allows student responses to modify the topic of discourse. In a study of collaborative talk among children attending a Welsh primary school, Lyle (1998) argues that narrative understanding should be seen as a primary meaning-making tool, a central aspect of

children's intellectual development which can be supported by 'dialogic engagement' between teacher and students. For Lyle, a dialogical conception of teaching and learning offers an emancipatory alternative to the traditional power-relationships of the classroom which tend to reproduce a pedagogy based on the transmission of pre-packaged knowledge. I will endeavour to make clear in what follows those points where there is a correspondence (or contrast) between my findings and the conclusions of these authors. I will also make use in my analysis of the concept of *instructional scripts* as formulated by Gutierrez (1994), which is consistent with the framework of dialogism, though not cognate with it. On the basis of a three-year ethnographic study of literacy education in nine classrooms, Gutierrez identified three different instructional scripts, viz. recitation, responsive, and responsive-collaborative scripts. Features of the recitation script include: a strict IRE discourse pattern (IRE standing for the teacher-led discursive sequence of Initiation-Response-Evaluation, which research has identified as a prototypical pattern of classroom talk between teachers and students [Cazden, 1988; Edwards & Westgate, 1994]); teacher selection of student speakers; and teacher-initiation of test-like questions, to which there is generally only one correct answer. With the responsive script standing between the other two terms as a mixed form, the responsive-collaborative script exhibits contrasting characteristics such as: 'chaining' of student responses, whereby student utterances may follow and build on preceding student utterances; self-selection by students speakers; and initiation by teacher and students of questions for which there are no specific correct answers.

The source of the transcripts

The extracts presented below were gathered by two students following a Masters course led by the author as part of a coursework assignment for a module which includes a focus on classroom discourse. Students following the module were asked to record and analyse a sequence of discourse involving interaction between a teacher and school students; the assignment guidelines suggested that a small group discussion activity would be a suitable example. The choice of topic or curriculum area was left to the students; in the

event, both of these students chose to record discussions which took place during guided reading sessions within the 'literacy hour'. (As part of its National Literacy Strategy, the British government introduced a daily literacy hour in primary schools from September 1998. The hour is divided into four periods of fixed duration, during which specified forms of organisation and activity are to be used. For twenty minutes of the hour, the teacher may take an ability group for guided reading, while the rest of the class works independently. It is from discussions during this period that the extracts below are taken.) As part of the course, students had read and discussed a number of pieces of published educational research which presented and discussed transcripts of classroom discourse (e.g. Cazden, 1988; Edwards & Westgate, 1994; Edwards & Mercer, 1987; Mercer, 1992; Mercer, 1994); in taught sessions, I also introduced and attempted to explicate some of the theoretical concepts which have been developed in this tradition of research, and which were mentioned above (e.g. the IRE sequence, authentic vs. test-like questions, instructional scripts). The students who recorded the sequences presented below kindly gave their permission for me to make use of these extracts in this paper, and also read and commented on a draft version of the paper. I have tried to make clear in what follows those points where they disagreed with or wished to qualify my interpretations. Pseudonyms have been used to disguise the identity of the school students. In transcribing the extracts for this paper, I have used a modified version of the conventions set forth in Silverman (1997), i.e.:

[	simultaneous speech
(Docky)	obscure speech (words inside the parentheses represent the transcriber's best estimate of what is being said)
[...]	omitted speech
(.)	pause of one second or longer
=	'latched' utterances, with no silence between them
No.	bold font indicates speech which is louder than the surrounding discourse (typically, where the speaker is emphasising a point)
° Oh yeah. °	degree symbols surround speech which is lower in volume than

	the surrounding discourse
'He heard a dog'	single quotation marks surround discourse which represents verbatim reading from the text
(*laughs*)	italics within parentheses indicate contextual information interpolated by the transcriber

I have also lightly punctuated the transcripts, for example to indicate apparent sentence boundaries, and have numbered speakers' turns for ease of reference.

Talk about texts in the classroom

Sequence 1: True or false?

Sequence 1 is taken from a literacy session involving five year 5 students in a multicultural primary school in south-east England. There is one girl in the group, Fiona, who is identified as having general learning difficulties; the four boys each have statements for specific learning difficulties. (One of the boys is silent during the sequence transcribed below.) The group meets daily with the female teacher in charge of the school's resource for specific learning difficulties during the second half of the literacy hour. Before this discussion, the students had taken turns to read a story called 'Rocky's Fox'(Krailing, 1998); they are now asked to consider a series of statements about the story and determine whether they are (i) true (ii) false, or (iii) there is not enough evidence to decide. They are familiar with this type of task, though the text is new to them. As we join the discussion, they are considering the statement 'He [i.e. Rocky, the main character] heard a dog barking'; in understanding the sequence it will help the reader to know that, in the story, Rocky hears a barking noise which he knows is *not* made by a dog; later, a neighbour tells him that it was a fox. One student (Kevin) has already argued that the statement is false, but Fiona disagrees, saying: 'It's true 'cause he did hear a dog barking.' The teacher re-reads the relevant section of the story with Fiona, then continues:

1.	Teacher:	Right. So is it true or false? (Docky) knew the sound (.) erm (.) 'He heard a dog barking.' Did he hear in the first picture on the first page did he hear that barking (.) to be a dog?
2.	Fiona:	Yes.
3.	Teacher:	It wasn't a dog (.) Fiona.
4.	Students:	[Fox. [False =
5.	Teacher:	= It was false because it was a fox barking. How does he know it was a fox barking? 'Cause he described it to Mr Keeping later on and Mr Keeping said **ha** that's a fox bark. Fox (.) foxes bark like that. Do you understand? Not really do you?
6.	Fiona:	Erm. *(Fiona shakes her head).*
7.	Teacher:	Why do you think that it's a dog barking? You tell me **one** piece of information from that story to tell you that it's a dog.
8.	Fiona:	Because erm foxes don't bark and dogs does (.) do.
9.	Alex:	Foxes [do.
10.	Teacher:	[OK look at page six Fiona.
11.	Alex:	Foxes bark like that.
12.	Teacher:	Page six? OK. Read it with me.
13.	Teacher and Fiona:	'The next day Rocky saw Mr Keeping. He told him about the noise.'
14.	Teacher:	What noise Fiona? What noise?
15.	Fiona:	The noise what the fox was making.
16.	Teacher:	The noise that the fox was making. Which noise was the fox making?
17.	Fiona:	A dog (.) noise. (*Fiona laughs*).
18.	Teacher:	He was barking. The fox was barking yeah? So the noise that he heard in the night. So he told him about the noise. Carry on (.)

reading (.) page six. 'That' =

19. Teacher and Fiona: = 'will be a fox said Mr Keeping. Foxes bark like that.'

20. Teacher: So.

21. Alex: It's true =

22. Teacher: = So the noise he heard on that first page was a bark. He thought it **might** have been a dog.

23. Fiona: It wasn't.

24. Teacher: But it **wasn't** a dog. What was it?

25. Fiona: He knew it wasn't a dog.

26. Teacher: What was it?

27. Fiona: It was a fox.

28. Teacher: It was a fox. And the statement says on your sheet 'He heard a dog barking.' Did he hear a dog barking?

29. Kevin: **No**.

30. Teacher: So is it true or false?

31. Fiona: [False.

32. Richard: [It was false.

33. Teacher: Do you understand?

34. Fiona: ° Yes. °

35. Teacher: OK next sentence.

Fiona's initial view here is indeed mistaken within the terms of reference of the activity, so the teacher is quite right not to pass over her comment, but to try and make her think again. She seeks to guide Fiona's thinking by directing her attention to the relevant part of the story, re-reading the passage with her, and asking questions designed to test her understanding of the crucial points (turns 10-13 and following). This strategy could be

interpreted as an attempt to 'scaffold' the student's learning by reducing the degrees of freedom for the learner and accentuating critical features of the task (Mercer, 1992; Mercer, 1994; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976; Wood & Wood, 1996). In spite of the rational motivation behind the teacher's intervention, however, I would question whether some features of the exchange might not prove counter-productive with regard to the aim of enhancing the students' literate thinking. First, in this extract, the teacher takes half of the speaking turns; and nearly half of her turns are convergent or 'test' questions, i.e. questions which have a prespecified answer already known to the teacher (1, 14, 16, 24, 26, 28, 30), and which typically elicit from the student a yes/no answer, or the recitation of a word or phrase from the text; the pattern of the dialogue thus approximates to a sequence of IRE exchanges. Although the surface form of one question appears to invite Fiona to explain her reasoning (7), the added imperative conveys the teacher's incredulity, suggesting that the utterance is *functionally equivalent* to a negation (Hodge & Kress, 1993); it pre-emptively contradicts any response which the student might make, and seems tantamount to saying, 'You *can't* tell me one bit of information from that story ...'. Finally, the teacher overrides two contributions from another student (9, 11) which might have helped to clear up Fiona's misunderstanding. Alex offers to correct the gap in Fiona's general knowledge which lies at the root of her mistake; but the teacher chooses to ignore his interventions in favour of directing Fiona to retrieve information once again from the text. This is symptomatic of an interaction marked by highly asymmetrical speaking rights; in contrast to everyday conversation between peers, for example, here the teacher exercises near-total control over turn-taking, allocating turns to students, and disallowing student self-nomination. Whilst we cannot know how the discussion would have progressed if she had incorporated Alex's intervention, ignoring him seems to close off an opportunity for using the students' combined knowledge as a resource to develop their collective thinking, in favour of reinforcing the teacher's position as the sole 'arbiter of valid knowledge' (Edwards & Mercer, 1987).

The tone and rhythm of the dialogue in this extract, then, largely conforms to the properties of the 'recitation script' which typifies much classroom interaction, according to Gutierrez (1994): the IRE pattern predominates; the teacher selects student speakers;

there is little or no acknowledgement of student self-selection; student responses tend to be short, and the teacher does not encourage elaboration of responses; and the teacher uses many 'test' questions, where the implied role of the student is to contribute a predetermined 'right' answer in response. One situationally-specific factor which may contribute to this outcome is the nature of the published support materials which the teacher is using. As was mentioned above, these materials construct a heavily constrained form of comprehension activity: for each statement about the story which the students are asked to discuss, only three possible answers are available (true / false / not enough evidence), and in each case only one of these is deemed 'correct'. Publishers may claim, and teachers be led to believe, that this kind of material is particularly suited to students who experience difficulties with reading, on the grounds that it offers a 'structured' approach to the teaching of comprehension skills. My interpretation of this episode, however, suggests that such 'teacher-proof' materials carry a risk of lodging classroom talk into its default groove of recitation, to the detriment of students' autonomous ability to engage in literate thinking. This analysis is consistent with the conclusions of Nystrand's (1997) study, which found that a test-centred approach to comprehension work was particularly prevalent among lower-track classes, and that such 'monologically-organised' forms of instruction were ineffective in promoting cognitive change.

It is clear that the teacher has induced Fiona to change her mind through this discussion, and has brought her to assent to a correct answer in the comprehension exercise; but at what cost? The episode seems to enact a model of comprehension as the ability to reproduce a canonical interpretation of the text, a common but restrictive feature of the speech genre of classroom discussion of literature according to Marshall et al. (1995). In Bakhtinian terms, the outcome can be viewed as an instance of 'pedagogical dialogue': the teacher's utterances tend towards the monologism characteristic of authoritative discourse, in which 'someone who knows and possesses the truth instructs someone who is ignorant of it and in error.' Allowing for the constraints imposed by the support materials in this case, we might nevertheless ask whether alternative responses by the teacher at specific points could have lent a more productive turn to the dialogue. Would

Fiona's learning have been better assisted, for example, if at turn 3 the teacher had requested her to elaborate on the reasoning behind her (mistaken) thinking, instead of making a straightforward contradiction? What if Fiona's statement 'foxes don't bark' (turn 8) had been treated as an opportunity to open the floor to other students, rather than directing the group's attention immediately back to the text? These instances can be seen as *critical turning-points* in the discourse, where the teacher's utterances influence the shape and tone of the subsequent interaction, in this case pushing it in the familiar direction of teacher-dominated recitation, but where alternative choices were available which might have challenged the students to engage in a higher level of literate thinking.

Responding to my analysis of this extract, the student who recorded the episode argued that my criticism of the teacher's decision to require Fiona to re-read portions of the story (turns 13 and 19) was misconceived, since it failed to take sufficient account of the teacher's instructional goals. A primary purpose of this activity, she argued, was to encourage the students to develop the skill of retrieving specific information from the text. From this point of view, the strategy of returning to the text and testing the student's literal understanding of the narrative material was precisely what was needed. She also drew my attention to a different episode which occurred later in the same teaching sequence, and which is not represented in the transcribed extract. During an exchange between the teacher and students on a subsequent comprehension question, the students individually voice arguments to support each of the alternative possible answers, some arguing that the statement is true, others that it is false, and another that there is not enough evidence to decide. As the student who recorded the extract concedes, the discourse in this later episode remains rather teacher-dominated, but the teacher does acknowledge the validity of the students' differing views; rather than trying to force them to select one 'correct' answer, she praises their independent reasoning, and on this occasion invites them to record individually whichever answer they think is right – an approach which clearly recognises the possibility of different interpretations of the text, in contrast with my reading of the episode above. In general, she felt that any attempt to compare this extract with the following sequence ought to recognise that there are 'horses for courses', i.e. that teachers may pursue different, equally valid goals during

comprehension-related work, and that close reading of the text to demonstrate literal understanding is an important skill for students to practice.

Sequence 2: Who is most to blame?

Sequence 2 is taken from a discussion among five students in a vertically-grouped year 5 / 6 class in a multicultural urban primary school in south-east England. The group comprises two girls and three boys; for three of the group English is an additional language; two of the students were on the school's register of special educational needs at the time of the recording, one having a statement of special educational needs. The teacher, who is also the group's class teacher, is male. The group are discussing their views on the characters in a story called 'Blue Riding Hood' (Hunt, 1995), which they have just read together. This is a modern parody of the familiar fairy tale, rewritten to subvert the stereotypical characters and events of the original story. The notes which accompany the story suggest that none of the characters behave very well, but some might be seen as better than others; the students are asked to discuss the story and try to put the characters in order, from least to most blameworthy. As we join the discussion, the group has just been talking about the character of the wolf in the story; the teacher now moves them on to consider others.

1. Teacher: Okay we have other characters. Who should we discuss next?
2. Ian: Erm (.) the woodcutter.
3. Teacher: Where does he come on the scale?
4. Ian: Near the end.
5. Suma: Because when she was wandering around in the forest and he met her and the he told her that he's going to show her grandmother how to behave (.) and he had an axe and (.) the the (.) he took the skin off the wolf and he killed grandma.
6. Ian: No they didn't know there was bears in the forest and erm there they thought she would just get lost in the woods.

7. Kulvinder: But the woodcutter bashed granny's door down.

8. Penda: I don't think he was well behaved (.) because he should have come and talked to her not smash her house down.

9. Suma: Yeah but granny still behaved in the same way even when the woodcutter was in her house.

10. Kulvinder: Granny (.) was mean and she was just horrible she just tells her to get out of the house. [...] (*There is a hiatus in the transcript at this point because the audiotape had to be changed while the group continued to talk.*)

11. Teacher: Okay should we now try to put the characters in some sort of order?

12. Kulvinder: Woodcutter (.) granny Blue Red Riding Hood and the wolf.

13. Colin: I had the wolf then the woodcutter then Blue Riding Hood then granny.

14. Ian: I had Blue Riding Hood the wolf the woodcutter then granny.

15. Suma: The woodcutter the Red Riding Hood the wolf then granny **granny**.

16. Penda: The wolf the woodcutter Blue Riding Hood then granny.

17. Teacher: It is very difficult isn't it? I would say the wolf although we agreed his behaviour was far from perfect. Then I would say (.) you need to think about what happened. Granny threw Blue Riding Hood out of the House yeah? Erm now that was quite deliberate =

18. Ian: = A **witch**.

19. Penda: Yeah she started everything it was all her fault (.) if she hadn't thrown Red I mean Blue Riding Hood none of this would have happened.

20. Kulvinder: But Blue Red Riding Hood killed the wolf.

21. Penda: ° Oh yeah. °

22. Colin: None of them were really nice.

23. Ian: No.

24. Penda: But whose fault was it?

25. Suma: I think granny's.

26. Colin: But she didn't kill any one.

27. Penda: No but it was her fault really wasn't it?

28. Kulvinder: She wasn't very nice (.) well I didn't like (.) she **deserved** to be eaten.

29. Colin: She wasn't killed on purpose was she?

30. Ian: The woodcutter killed her.

31. Colin: No she was eaten by bears.

32. Ian: I mean it was his fault he erm chucked her out.

33. Teacher: Well we have run out of time. I think you have done very well. I thought it was hard to sort them out but you together all of you have done that really well. I don't think there is a right or wrong answer if there was we wouldn't have had much to talk about.

It could be argued that the students in this sequence would have benefited from being asked to elaborate or unpack some of their more elliptical comments (e.g. turn 5). It also seems a pity that the teacher feels obliged to terminate the discussion before the students have had chance to compare their views on all the characters systematically; as it stands, the discussion has only touched on their views about one of the central characters in the story (Blue Riding Hood). Nevertheless, there are several marked contrasts between the discourse in this extract and that in Sequence 1, which raise significant questions with regard to efforts to enhance students' abilities to engage in 'literate thinking'. First, in this extract, the turns are much more evenly distributed between speakers. Significantly, the teacher takes less than one-sixth of the turns; all of the students make a number of contributions, and these are spread throughout the sequence. Equally important is the quality of the resulting dynamic between the speakers: the sequence departs almost completely from the teacher-led, IRE pattern so frequently found in studies of classroom discourse. In this case, the teacher's initial questions (1 and 3) are authentic, i.e. they function as genuine invitations to the students to explain their views; turn 1 in fact cedes control over the sequence of topics to the students. More remarkably in the context of

teacher-student talk, the bulk of the discussion is taken up by a series of student-student exchanges (turns 4-10, 18-32), uninterrupted by the teacher. These exchanges exemplify two important characteristics of the 'responsive-collaborative' script described by Gutierrez (1994). In the first place, there is minimal teacher selection of students; students self-select, or select other students, whilst the teacher frames and facilitates the activity, but generally adopts a 'light touch' approach to intervention. Secondly, there is 'chaining' of student utterances, in which each utterance builds on preceding contributions, qualifying, questioning, or contradicting what previous speakers have said. Whereas in much classroom discourse, the right to ask questions is a privilege reserved to the teacher (Cazden, 1988), in this discussion it is normal for students to address questions to each other (24, 27, 29). Students explain the reasons for their views about the story, collectively exploring its polysemic potential; in so doing, they are necessarily involved in glossing the text, re-interpreting the significance of events in the narrative in an act of retelling which goes beyond the words on the page; cf. the use of a modal proposition by one student in turn 8 ('he *should* have come and talked to her'), or the hypothetical statement in turn 13 ('*if* she *hadn't* thrown ... Blue Riding Hood none of this *would have* happened'), both of which appeal to alternative storyworlds which did not happen in the actual narrative under consideration. In such exchanges, the students challenge and counter each other's thinking; at one point this process seems to lead to a re-evaluation of one element of the story by one of the students (turn 21). I would suggest that the educational significance of these features of the talk is that they constitute a joint exercise in problem-solving which has the potential to act as a model for the development of the students' autonomous literacy practices: by pooling their thinking and making it public, they are also encouraged to make it more explicit, and to open it up to modification through considering other points of view, with the result that they attain a richer understanding of the story collectively than they would be likely to achieve individually. The collective process of knowledge generation accomplished through the external, social dialectic of discussion and debate is then available to be appropriated by the students and take their independent powers of comprehension on to a new, higher level of development.

A significant contextual difference between Sequence 1 and Sequence 2 is the nature of the comprehension task which the students are asked to carry out under the guidance of the teacher. In the present case, the students are asked to discuss which character in the story is most to blame, a question to which various answers are possible, none of which is uniquely 'correct'. It is therefore inherent in the nature of the task that they are required to think about the narrative, to evaluate it and actively to construe its significance, rather than merely recall the sequence of events. This recalls another aspect of the distinction drawn by Bakhtin between authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse (Bakhtin, 1981: 341):

> When verbal disciplines are taught in school, two basic modes are recognised for the appropriation and transmission – simultaneously – of another's words (a text, a rule, a model): 'reciting by heart' and 'retelling in one's own words.'

Here the students are invited to retell the story in their own words rather than merely recite it by heart. I would argue that the more internally persuasive form of classroom discourse generated as a result is better suited than an authoritative, recitational mode to the goal of enhancing students' autonomous abilities to engage in literate thinking.

Commenting on an earlier draft of this paper, the student who recorded this extract pointed out that the discussion was terminated at the point it was because the guidance on the literacy hour obliged him to operate within a limited timescale (the time for group activity during the literacy hour is restricted to twenty minutes). He also reported that he had conducted similar exercises on a weekly basis outside the framework of the literacy hour, with the specific aim of developing the students' discussion skills and their willingness to become independent of the teacher. Finally, he provided extra contextual information about the teacher's non-verbal behaviour during the sequence. For instance, to keep the discussion moving, the teacher maintained eye contact with the students and used non-verbal prompts, such as raising a hand to prevent interruptions and then nodding when it was appropriate for a student to make additional comments. He also 'glared' at students who had not spoken for some time to encourage them to make a contribution. He felt that knowledge of these strategies, which are not marked in the transcript, was important for an understanding of how the group was managed.

From pedagogical dialogue to dialogical pedagogy

The conditions under which the two sequences of classroom discourse presented above were produced were sufficiently similar to render a comparison between them of interest from an educational point of view. The size of the groups and the age of the students were similar; since both groups were taking part in focused comprehension discussions on the topic of texts which they had just read, during guided reading sessions within the tightly prescribed parameters of the literacy hour, we can also say that the genre of activity in which they were engaged was broadly comparable. No-one, I think, would expect the resulting discussions to be identical in form; however, my analysis has drawn attention to a number of systematic, pervasive contrasts between the sequences which are, so to speak, built into the structural dynamics of interaction between the participants in these episodes. I have argued that Sequence 1 conforms in many respects to the norms of the recitation script described by Gutierrez (1994) (such as the predominance of the IRE pattern, teacher allocation of turns, and the use of test questions). Drawing on the dialogical theory of language developed by the Bakhtin Circle, I have suggested that this outcome can be viewed as an instance of 'pedagogical dialogue', in which someone who knows the truth instructs someone who is in error, and which is characterised by a tendency towards the use of authoritative discourse on the part of the teacher, i.e. utterances which enjoin the student to recite from the text or to assent to the position expressed by the teacher, rather than inviting the student to explain their own point of view. In contrast, my reading of Sequence 2 has suggested that this exchange exhibits the properties of the responsive-collaborative script identified by Gutierrez, e.g. the chaining of student utterances, self-selection of speaking turns by students, and the use of authentic questions by teacher and students. I have interpreted this outcome as an example of Bakhtin's concept of internally persuasive discourse, in which students are invited to retell the story in their own words and voice their own evaluative orientations; this form of dialogue has a semantically open structure, tending not towards convergence on a single agreed standpoint, but towards a recursive, self-generating process of continuous

redefinition, qualification and modification of intersubjectively-accomplished understanding.

One question raised by my analysis is the appropriateness of comprehension exercises based on a forced-choice task structure where the text in question is of a quasi-literary kind. In both sequences, the teacher and students were discussing texts belonging to the genre of short narrative fiction. However, in Sequence 1, their responses were constrained by the requirement to respond to propositional statements about the text, and to assign them to one of a fixed range of categories (true / false / not enough evidence). There are other genres of written text where this kind of standardised testing of literal understanding might be an appropriate model of reading comprehension, for example a set of instructions on how to perform a scientific experiment, or a recipe for cooking a meal. However, it seems far from an authentic model of the kinds of process in which experienced readers engage when reading and evaluating literary texts, such as fictional narratives; indeed, it is difficult to think of any situation outside the classroom where readers would need to respond to this kind of text in such a fashion. I would suggest that the critical understanding and appreciation of literary texts is a cultural practice which can, and should, be deliberately taught in schools, but that crucially it needs to be seen as a *non-algorithmic* form of knowledge. If we reduce students' experience of this branch of literacy to the recitation of 'facts' about a story, then we are not presenting them with a simplified version of the task to be mastered; we are misrepresenting the nature of that task. This does not imply that teachers should not attempt to structure their students' encounters with literary texts, but rather that there are other, more open-ended kinds of question or activity (such as the example in Sequence 2) which can be used to focus their discussion or writing, and which provide students with an opportunity to participate actively in shaping their own understanding of and orientation towards the text. For this reason, I would suggest that they are better suited to inducting students into the literacy practices which they need to develop if they are to become autonomous agents in the culture of which they are members. This conclusion is compatible with the findings of Nystrand (1997) and Lyle (1998), which also made use of Bakhtinian theory in the context of researching literacy education, though I believe that this paper has made a

more explicit connection than these previous studies between observable patterns of teacher-student dialogue and the concepts of authoritative and internally persuasive discourse. One could also take this argument further and suggest that, where the aim is to enhance students' ability to engage in 'literate thinking' (Wells & Chang-Wells, 1992), then *the process is the product*; from this point of view, instead of relying on scores attained in standardised tests, it would be appropriate to base the assessment of students' literacy development, at least in part, on an examination of the communicative competence they display in structured group discussions about texts which they have read.

Classroom discourse does not, of course, occur in a vacuum, but within a climate formed by the broader ideologies at work in society, and the local conditions of the school as an institution; through this climate, teachers and students are enculturated into certain expectations about what it might mean to 'do' teaching and learning in this particular classroom, in this particular school. Previous research into literacy education has shown that, whilst more dialogical forms of instruction can be accomplished, teacher-centred recitation persists as a depressingly prevalent norm (Cairney, 1995; Marshall, et al., 1995; Nystrand, 1997). The social history of classroom talk, which has prioritised authoritative discourse on the part of the teacher, creates its own inertia, which it will require a conscious effort on the part of teachers to overcome. In the UK at the time of writing, these pressures of expectation are powerfully reinforced by the policy of the New Labour government, in which the centrally-prescribed mechanism of the literacy hour is wedded to an apparatus of standardised testing and a set of arbitrary, quantified targets against which the performance of schools will be measured. The monological view of pedagogy implicit in government policy receives ideological support from reportage which offers a purely technicist image of teaching as an activity akin to the skilled operation of a piece of machinery, in which abstract 'teaching behaviours' affect the equally disembodied phenomenon of 'learning gain' (Reynolds, 1998). Notwithstanding these pressures, it would be a mistake to think of teacher-student interaction as the deterministic outcome of larger social forces over which the participants have no control. My analysis has rather suggested that the discursive micro-economy of the classroom has its own relative

autonomy; whilst recitation may be its 'default' script, alternative, more participatory modes of organisation are available. At certain pivotal moments during teacher-student dialogue, the lead offered by the teacher can have real and educationally significant consequences for the course of the subsequent talk: it may tend to retrace the familiar certitudes of authoritative, teacher-controlled discourse; or it may invite students to engage in the riskier, more taxing, but more fulfilling enterprise of formulating and being answerable for their own thinking. It is reasonable to suppose that encouraging teachers to collect and analyse examples of talk from their own classrooms could be a useful starting point for professional development (Westgate & Hughes, 1997), which might sensitise them to these alternatives, and enable individual practitioners consciously to create the conditions under which students can actively participate in a co-operative process of enquiry, which are also the conditions likely to support the probing, exploratory qualities of internally persuasive discourse. However, if such a shift is to affect the general culture of education, rather than to eke out a tenuous existence in isolated classrooms scattered throughout an unreformed system of schooling, then it would seem that action on a larger scale than that of the individual teacher is required. In the face of increasing state prescription of curriculum and pedagogy, the introduction of payment by results, and the dogmatic dismissal by government of all criticism of its policies as 'elitism' (Marshall, 1999), it must be doubted whether a general shift from 'pedagogical dialogue' to a dialogical pedagogy can be accomplished without collective action on the part of the teaching force aimed at regaining a measure of professional autonomy and securing greater control over the exercise of their own labour power.

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